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ABSTRACT

Characteristics of white students at Delaware State College, a traditionally black institution, and their views on how the college could meet their needs were investigated via a 34-item questionnaire mailed to a random sample of 462 white students. Usable responses were obtained from 236 students concerning: personal background, occupational goals, circumstances pertaining to enrollment, personal feelings about the college and its mission, and participation in cocurricular activities. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Findings, including responses to open-ended questions, include the following about the white students: (1) their demographic characteristics were different from that of the overall student population; (2) financial cost and location were major reasons for attendance; (3) they were largely uninterested in participating in campus activities, even when available; (4) while some racial issues were evident, white students appeared to be more concerned about getting a quality education; (5) a majority did not believe that the college must play down its black heritage in order to attract white students; and (6) respondents found social/human relation benefits from attending a historically black institution. Although most appeared to be more involved with their own circle of friends, 50.4 percent indicated that if activities of interest were scheduled during the evening, they would attend. Most of the white respondents clearly saw the pursuit of a degree as the major, and for many, the only matter of interest. Some student comments are included. (SW)

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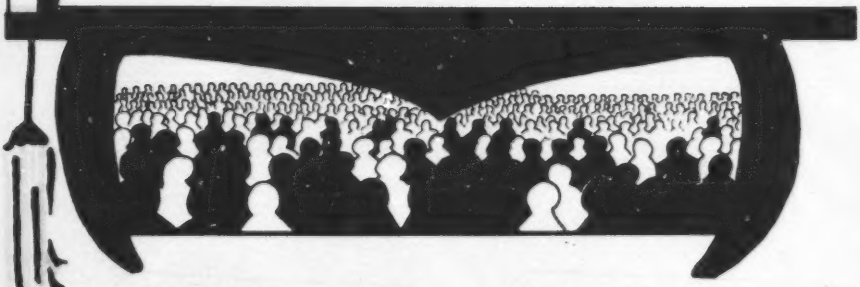
Meeting the Challenge to Serve



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COOPERATIVE PROJECT

This paper has been identified by a joint project of The Institute on Desegregation at North Carolina Central University and ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at George Washington University. The purposes of this project are to identify, collect, and make available literature concerned with

(1) the problems of minority students in higher education in general and
(2) the problems of desegregation in historically black colleges and universities in particular.

New published and unpublished materials are reviewed and recommended by participants of the Institute on Desegratation's Interinstitutional Research Group (ID/IRG) for acquisition by ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education. An annual bibliography of this material will be published under the names of ERIC and the Institute.

Various types of materials are being solicited, especially unpublished and unindexed materials, as well as publications, produced by faculty and staff members. Included in these may be unpublished faculty studies, institutional research studies, master's theses, monographs, papers presented at professional meetings, articles from general and scholarly periodicals, and conference and workshop proceedings not covered by ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education.

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If additional information is needed about this cooperative project or the criteria for selection of materials, please write or call the Director of the Institute on Desegregation at 919/683-6433, North Carolina Central University, Durham, North Carolina 27707.

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James E. Lyons

Vice President

Introduction

Delaware State College, a progressive land-grant institution in Dover, Delaware, is the only exclusively four-year public institution in the State. It is committed to academic excellence and intellectual competence. Freedom of expression and inquiry, the exchange of ideas, cultural activities, intensive classroom instruction, and other formal events in the college community combine to ensure that each student receives a thorough and marketable education.

Founded on May 15, 1891 as a "College for the Education of Colored Students in Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts" by virtue of the Second Morrill Act of Congress, Delaware State College provided the only opportunity for black citizens of the State to receive a post secondary education. For most of its 88 years, the college served the black community. Over the past several years, the college has made an attempt to become a true "State College".

As the only exclusively four-year State College, the institution has recognized and accepted the challenge to provide the citizens of the State of Delaware with an educational program at a cost that they can afford. It has reached out to all citizens of the State without regard to race, creed, color, age or sex. As a result, the non-black enrollment is currently 36% of the total enrollment. At the same time the institution has continued to express its committment to the black experience and tradition.

During the past decade, the attention of colleges and universities across the nation has focused, as never before, on the increasing number of black students attending predominantly white institutions. However, very little attention has been given to the current increase of white students enrolled in historically black colleges and universities. This imbalance or omission in investigation leaves a glaring void in the literature on post secondary institutions in America. Thus, one clear justification for a study of this nature is to expand the information base relative to historically black colleges.

A second justification for such a study lies in the area of planning for the future. The administration, faculty, staff, and students have been actively involved in a long-range planning process. Studying and projecting future enrollment trends, student characteristics, student attitudes, shifting career interests, and traditional versus non-traditional clientele, are an important part of the planning process. Therefore, it is important that the college have an understanding of the attitudes and concerns of its white students as well as its black students. Many of the critics of the historically black colleges and universities advance the argument that the institution must undergo major changes now that white students are matriculating. They argue that these institutions should change their missions, de-emphasize their blackness, and change their policies and procedures. Some have even argued that these institutions should no longer function under black leadership now that white students make up a significant percentage of the enrollment. Thus, the study will seek to find out what the students themselves have to say about the critical issues facing historically black colleges.

More recently, the Adams v. Richardson case has focused considerable attention on the desegregation of several southern and border states. The State of Delaware is one of the states waiting for the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights to decide whether Delaware is operating segregated colleges and universities in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The response will be the result of a 1978 investigation of the racial make-up of the higher education system in Delaware. This study, and previous attempts to involve all students in the life of the college, should demonstrate that Delaware State College was concerned about its students long before the Office for Civil Rights began its investigation.

Procedures

In order to investigate these and other concerns relative to white students and their impact on future planning at Delaware State College, a proposal was submitted to and subsequently funded by the Educational Awards Committee of the Metropolitan Life Foundation. The original purpose of the study was to determine (1) how active a role the non-black students are playing in the life of the college, (2) what changes they believe the college will have to make in order to meet their needs, (3) the sensitivity of administrators, faculty, and student leaders, to the increasing number of white students, and (4) whether the college should change its mission based on the new clientele. As is so often the case, neither time nor resources permitted such an exhaustive study. However, those issues that were not a part of the questionnaire were discussed in a follow-up meeting with the students.

To implement the study, a thirty-four (34) item questionnaire was mailed to a random sample of 462 white students who were enrolled at the college during the Spring Semester of 1980. Usable questionnaires were returned by 236 or 51% of the students. The instrument sought to gather data on the students in the following areas of concern: (1) personal background, (2) occupational goals, (3) circumstances pertaining to enrollment, (4) personal feelings about the college and its mission, and (5) participation in co-curricular activities. The thirty-fourth item was open-ended to allow for any other comments that the students wished to make.

Finally, all students wishing to discuss the study at a follow-up meeting were invited to provide their names and telephone numbers. All other responses were anonymous. Fifty-six (56) respondents expressed an interest in attending the follow-up session.

Analysis and Findings
Demographic Data

All of the questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Program (SPSS). While a detailed analysis of all statistical ramifications of the data is beyond the scope of this report, the following analysis of the responses refers to statistically significant chi square and/or correlational results.

Of the 236 respondents ninety-two (92) or 39% fell between the ages of 17 and 24 which is considered to be the "traditional" college age population. Forty-two (42) or 17.8% of the respondents were between 25 and 29 years of age. Clearly 102 or 43.2% of the respondents were between the ages of 30 and 54.

In terms of marital status, 138 or 58.4% of the respondents are or have been married. This may help explain the fact that 111 or 47.1% of the respondents reported one or more children. Most of the respondents (71.6%) listed the State of Delaware as their place of longest residence, with 59.3% of those citing Kent County as their longest place of residence. Sixty-six (66) or 27.9% have spent the longest part of their lives in a state other than Delaware. Only six (6) or 2.5% of

the respondents indicated that they currently live or have lived on campus. This explains why 91.9% of the survey population can be classified as commuter students.

Slightly less than one half of the respondents (42.4%) were employed full-time. Veterans comprised 32.2% of the sample which also explains why so many of the respondents, nearly 20%, indicated that V.A. benefits helped finance their education. Sixty-eight (68) or 28.8% of the respondents financed their education with personal savings. A significant number of those surveyed indicated that business (26.3%) and education (21.6%) were their major areas of study. Forty-eight percent (48%) of the respondents were upperclassmen.

Finally, only forty-five (45) of the respondents indicated that they enrolled at Delaware State College immediately after graduation from high school, while 106 or 44.9% entered the college as transfer students (or received some credit for previous college work). One hundred and ninety-nine (199), or 84.3% of those surveyed, intend to graduate from Delaware State College.

Enrollment Information Analysis

In response to the question, why did you decide to attend Delaware State College, 142 or 60.2% of the respondents identified financial cost as their primary reason for attending. Another 83 or 35.2% indicated that the location of the College was their primary reason for attendance. White students were very much aware of the fact that Delaware State College was a historically black college at the time they made application. Only eighteen (18) students (7.6%) were unaware of this fact. Sixty-eight (68) students or 28.8% felt some reservation about attending Delaware State College, while nearly 71% of the respondents had no such reservation.

A reason for having reservations about attending Delaware State College was sought from the students. However, this question proved to be a very difficult one to analyze. As stated above, only sixty-eight (68) students indicated that they had any reservations. However, more than one hundred (100) students responded to the question, If you had concerns, what were they? Sixty-five (65) students indicated that their concerns were academic, twenty-six (26) indicated that their concerns were racial/social, and twelve (12) indicated that their concerns were financial. Ninety-one (91) students or 38.6% of the respondents indicated that they received some criticism from family and/or friends because they chose to attend Delaware State College.

Personal Feelings About The College

In response to the question, does the fact that Delaware State College is a historically black college bother you, 229 or 97% of the respondents said, no. In response to the question as to whether or not the college mission has hindered their progress toward the fulfillment of their educational objectives, 206 or 87.3% of the respondents said no. In the cover letter that accompanied the questionnaire, the students were reacquainted with the college mission:

The mission of Delaware State College is to provide for the people of Delaware, and others who are admitted to the College, meaningful and relevant education that emphasizes both the liberal and occupational aspects of higher education. Within this context, the college mission is to make educational opportunities available to all qualified citizens of this and other states, at a cost consistent with the economic status of the students as a whole. While recognizing its historical heritage, the college seeks to serve a diverse student population with a broad range of programs in instruction, service, and research, so that its graduates will become competent, productive, and contributing citizens.

In response to the question, should Delaware State College change its mission statement, 186 students or 78.8% of the students answered no. One of the most controversial questions in the survey was must Delaware State College "play-down" its Black Heritage in order to continue to attract white students. More than half of the students (54.7%) said that Delaware State College does not have to "play-down" its Black Heritage. An interesting 53.8% of the respondents felt that Delaware State College should make a deliberate effort to provide a racially balanced college campus. Finally, 207 respondents (87.7%) indicated that they would recommend Delaware State College to a prospective white student, while only sixteen (16) students indicated that it embarrassed them to tell their white friends that they attend Delaware State College.

Student Participation

Students were asked about the extent to which they expected to participate in non-academic activities at the college. Prior to entering, more than half of them (58.1%) did not plan to participate at all, while only 5.1% of the students planned to participate on a regular basis. These projections were quite consistent with what actually happened after the students enrolled.

Slightly more than half of those responding (51.3%) indicated that they did not have time to participate. When asked if they would participate if activities of interest to them were held in the evening, 44.5% indicated that they still would not participate. Students do, however, feel free to participate and express themselves freely in class. Nearly 89% of the students felt free to express their opinions. Finally, when asked about their future plans to participate in alumni activities, 152 or 64.4% of those responding indicated that they do not intend to participate in alumni activities when they graduate.

Discussion of Findings

While it is not always possible to draw firm conclusions from a survey questionnaire, if we combine the results of the questionnaire with the comments written in response to the open-ended questions, and the transcribed notes from the discussion session, certain findings become very apparent. They are as follows:

1. The demographic characteristics of the white students are different from that of the overall student population.

2. Financial cost and location are the major reasons that white students attend Delaware State College.

3. White students, for the most part, are not interested in participating in the day-to-day activities of the campus even if they are made available.

4. While some racial issues are evident, white students appear to be more concerned about getting a quality education than anything else.

5. A majority of the white students do not believe that Delaware State College must "play-down" its Black Heritage in order to continue to attract white students.

6. White students do derive social/human relations benefits from attending a historically black institution.

The following chart shows a demographic comparison between the respondents to the survey, and the student population as a whole.

	White Students	Overall Population
17-24 Years Old	39.0%	51%
Married	51.3%	23%
Veterans	32.2%	10%
Commuters	91.9%	45%
% of Upperclassmen	48.3%	40%

Thus we can very easily conclude that the white students at Delaware State College not only differ because of race, but perhaps more importantly, because of age, commuter status, and marital status. This is a very important factor because it suggests that some white students who may be experiencing difficulty, or who do not participate in student activities may have non-race related reasons for their actions. Many of the students expressed this fact in the questionnaire and at the discussion session.

* * * * * * * *

Many of the activities are not convenient for me as a commuter, so I go to class and go right home.

* * * * * * * *

I feel that I received a good education at Delaware State College and it really irks me when other people try to run the college down . . My age was the main reason for not participating in campus activities.

* * * * * * * *

My biggest complaint is that many part-time students have had difficulty trying to register for day time classes.

* * * * * * * *

As a commuter student who lives and works in Dover, I have found that Delaware State has adequately met my educational needs to date. As far as extra-curricular activities are concerned, I fully un-

derstand that the needs and interests of most of the students at the College do not coincide with mine due to my age, family, and occupational responsibilities.

* * * * * * * *

My reservations were due mostly to my age rather than racial factors although I had never before attended integrated classes. Age and social reservations have been mostly dispelled, as I have found everyone very nice and the instructors most appreciative of "mature students." I have felt more rapport with several older commuting black students with whom I have more in common than 18-20 year olds, regardless of race.

* * * * * * * *

An unfortunate rift between commuter and boarder students hurts many relationships and school "esprit de corps" Even your staff shows favoritism to one side or the other.

* * * * * * * *

The white students don't participate because of age difference and because some have jobs, families, or both.

* * * * * * * *

The problem between the blacks and whites is not as big as we think it is. It is the age difference that's the real problem.

* * * * * * * *

One of the more important lines in the Mission Statement of Delaware State College is:

> . . .**Within this context, the college mission is to make educational opportunities available to all qualified citizens of this and other states, at a cost consistent with the economic status of the students as a whole** . . .

It is therefore not surprising to find that 60% of the white students cited cost as their primary reason for attending the college. The college is filling a very important role of providing an education to citizens of the State at a reasonable cost. When this is tied in with the 35% of the students who selected Delaware State College because of its location, we can clearly state that the institution is attractive to 95% of the respondents because it is strategically located and offers a program of study at a reasonable cost. This would appear to be a very important selling point for the college.

As the cost of a higher education continues to rise, and if the energy crisis causes less travel on the state's highways, Delaware State College could play an increasingly significant role in the higher education picture of the State.

Evening Activities

Despite the fact that most of the students in the survey appear to be more involved with their own circle of friends, 50.4% of the respondents indicated

that if activities of interest to them were scheduled during the evening, they would attend. This response presents a very interesting challenge to the college. Both the survey and the discussion failed to reveal what kind of activities students really wanted. This question also had another important dimension. Specifically, there is a nucleus of white students who really want to be involved. volved. They take the position that Delaware State College is their school too and the white students must be represented on all committees that have student representation. However, it was difficult to determine whether input and participation referred to race or commuter status. (Many people use the words commuter and white synonymously even though there are black students who commute). Hopefully, the results of a similar survey of black commuter students will help the college identify and separate those items which are race related from those items which are residence/commuter related. In that way, the various offices, committees, etc., can initiate the appropriate action.

Academic Program

One factor that the study pointed out very clearly was that most white students clearly see the pursuit of a degree as the major, and for many, the only matter of interest to them. They made it clear that as long as Delaware State College provided them with a good quality education, they were not concerned about social or historical matters. On the other hand, black students are concerned about both academic and non-academic matters relative to their educational experience. The respondents to the survey made their feelings on this issue quite clear.

* * * * * * * *

I feel that academic excellence should have priority over everything else rather than emphasizing racial quotas.

* * * * * * * *

I am satisfied with the course content and instructors at Delaware State. They are comparable to the other two colleges I attended in Kansas and Utah. I find it deplorable that the general public in Delaware seems to regard Delaware State's graduates as "less educated" than those from other institutions of higher learning in Delaware.

* * * * * * * *

I feel and have always felt that any person can get a good education at Delaware State College. One only gets out of something what one puts into it.

* * * * * * * *

I feel that many instructors I've had spent too much time discussing what the white students' ancestors have done to persecute the blacks. This belongs in a black history class.

* * * * * * * *

I feel that I am receiving a well rounded education at Delaware State College. The teachers and staff are to be commended for the outstanding job they are doing.

* * * * * * * *

It is my sincere opinion that Delaware State College should take action to overcome its negative reputation. Forget about the school being either a black or a white college. Education, or rather the quality of education offered is most important.

* * * * * * * *

My husband attended Delaware State College and graduated in 1978. He has made rapid progress in the business world since that time.

* * * * * * * *

Occasionally, I felt that the academic standards were lower at Delaware State College than other colleges I have attended.

* * * * * * * *

Delaware State College is an academically excellent college in my opinion. I felt very comfortable as a white student there. Because of my favorable experience at Delaware State, I feel loyalty and gratitude.

* * * * * * * *

The only thing I think that Delaware State College could do is go through all the major academic departments and weed out the instructors that students give bad reports.

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Too much emphasis is placed on Delaware State being a historically black college. The goal should be to increase its academic standing by attracting better quality students and rearranging some of the major fields of study requirements to compete with other colleges and universities.

* * * * * * * *

If Delaware State College is to become a true State College then it must play down the black school image and balance the school racially. If this stigma could be removed and quality education built up, Delaware State College would attract more local residents, not just blacks.

* * * * * * * *

My main concern is that others (potential employers) do not feel that the degree from Delaware State is as valid as a degree from the

University of Delaware. Probably part of the problem is public relations because I feel that my instructors have been excellent.

* * * * * * * *

Delaware State could improve its image by upgrading the facilities and employing more and better qualified professors. I think that people would be willing to pay higher fees if these improvements were made. Delaware State College does have some very good professors, but needs more.

* * * * * * * *

Delaware State College's academic reputation is somewhat low in the white community and I was somewhat apprehensive about the quality of the school prior to entering. I was very impressed and pleasantly surprised at the high quality of instruction and the dedication of the professors I have encountered thus far.

* * * * * * * *

I had a concern about the quality of education because of rumors that I had heard but quickly found those tales to be unfounded. I enjoy going to Delaware State College and fully intend to graduate.

* * * * * * * *

Black Heritage

Perhaps the most significant question in the survey and surely the one that created the most discussion, was whether or not the college had to play-down its black heritage. It is significant that the majority of the students felt that Delaware State College could continue to attract white students without "playing down" its blackness. When combined with the discussion in the previous item, one can again conclude that the academic program is the primary concern of the majority of the respondents.

* * * * * * * *

I truly enjoyed my four years at the college. I thought it was very nice having the traditionally black college.

* * * * * * * *

Delaware State doesn't have to play down its heritage in order to attract the white populace. As heritage is revealed in the students it should not be repressed, but cherished. Therefore, by simply using the key word students as opposed to black or white, the separate heritages can intermingle to construct a working institution.

* * * * * * * *

It would be great if Delaware State College could always continue to celebrate its black heritage. However, I am afraid that financially the college will have to continue to provide an increasingly mixed

campus to attract white students who are able to pay for their education without grants.

* * * * * * * *

In my opinion Delaware State College can remain a "black" college and yet still serve the community as a whole. I feel that Delaware State College should strive to institute the fine qualities of schools like Howard and Morehouse College which have maintained their black identity and have simultaneously achieved academic excellence. To do so would necessitate some fundamental changes in the academic atmosphere of the school. The library is inadequate; the policy of acceptable non-attendance of classes is harmful; too many students pass courses and eventually graduate without learning the material; and too many teachers teach classes of 75 at the 400 level and are frustrated by the class size.

* * * * * * * *

Personal Benefits

Many individuals who defend the continued existence of the historically black colleges and universities agree that these institutions represent one of the places where people of different racial/ethnic groups can come together, learn about each other, and learn to appreciate the cultural and historical contributions of each group. In some ways the historically black colleges provide their states and the nation with a human relations laboratory. Some of the students' experiences support this position.

* * * * * * * *

I truly enjoyed my four years at the college. I thought it was very nice having the traditionally black college. I learned a lot about the people's views and different customs. I think it would be terrible to make the college any other way but a historically black college.

* * * * * * * *

Delaware State College has provided me with an education that has met my needs fully. It has also allowed me the opportunity to form meaningful relationships with people of all races, creeds, and colors that had not been at my disposal before. My experiences on the whole have been pleasant and my education has not only been academic but one of learning to adjust to new and different life styles and cultures which will only advance my understanding and compassion for my fellow man. I fully intend to continue to help Delaware State College's growth and development in any capacity I can after my graduation.

* * * * * * * *

I was only slightly prejudiced before attending and am even less so

now. I have enjoyed the friendship of many interesting and unique individuals on campus.

* * * * * * * *

The college should be proud of its black heritage, but it must recognize the changing values of the college. These can occur simultaneously. Also, the college has been a great experience for me. I have had an opportunity to be exposed to some people and ideas that helped in my growth.

* * * * * * * *

I have met many worthwhile people who have added to my life. It has taught me many lessons in understanding different cultures.

* * * * * * * *

I enjoyed attending Delaware State College and view it as both an educational and learning experience. I enjoy knowing so many delightful black brothers and sisters and I also enjoy being exposed to the loving atmosphere which the black community extends.

* * * * * * * *

I feel that one of the most valuable parts of my education at Delaware State College is the experience of meeting black people who are in my own socio-economic and education level. This was a completely new experience for me. . .

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Conclusions

It is always difficult to try and generalize from a study which has so many hidden variables. However, there are certain conclusions that can be made based on a composite perspective which includes the instrument itself, the open comments section of the questionnaire, and the comments that were made at the follow-up discussion session. These conclusions are based on the student population at Delaware State College. Other similar institutions must be careful not to make the same conclusions unless the student population at their institution is similar.

1. The college can expect a large number of white students to enroll. However, the challenge facing the institution may be in the area of addressing a "non-traditional" student population as opposed to a new racial clientele. The retired military officer who has decided to matriculate at Delaware State College presents many challenges as a result of his twenty-five (25) years of administrative, management, personnel and financial planning experience. Clearly, he has brought a wealth of experiences to the college unlike that of most undergraduate students. Surely his age and experience, not his race, will present the major challenge to our faculty. The majority of the white students and an increasing number of black students are older than the traditional col-

lege population. Delaware State College must plan for and be prepared to meet the unique needs of these students.

2. The vast majority of the white students at Delaware State College are interested in receiving a quality education that will lead to a degree that will be marketable. Many of these students are currently employed and see the degree as a way of enhancing their job status. Many others are in entry level employment situations and need the additional educational experience to move up the career ladder. They are extremely sensitive to the negative public image that many persons have about the college, and will continue to demand that the State of Delaware provide Delaware State College with the support needed to maintain a quality program both on campus, and in the eyes of the public. For this group of students, unlike many between the ages of 17 and 21, it's a question of survival. For them, the higher the regard for Delaware State College, the greater the likelihood that their degree will be considered as good as that of other major institutions of higher learning.

3. It is clear that as the college approaches the year 2000, it stands at the threshold of being the State institution of Delaware. Students are going to continue to come to Delaware State College because it offers a wide variety of majors, at a cost and in a location that is convenient to them. Here, the State of Delaware faces a formidable challenge. Delaware State College can be the major undergraduate institution in this region if the State would make the financial commitment. White students, black students, students from Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania find that Delaware State College meets some needs that no other institution in the area can meet. A serious financial investment in Delaware State College can prove to be one of the best investments that the State will ever make.

4. Delaware State College is one of the most highly desegregated institutions in the country, that has not had to abandon its historical mission. Every indication is that the college can continue its role of preserving the black tradition and yet offer a quality academic program to all students who choose to attend. The faculty, administration, staff, and student body should form a partnership with the State and Federal Government to insure that Delaware State College survives. If this country is a true multi-racial community where a variety of cultural experiences can exist simultaneously, then it would appear that Delaware State College is America, and this "experience," this "laboratory," of the American ideal must continue.